

Hall. The speech was attended by a wide spectrum of Wilmington residents, including a large number of Red Shirts and wives of leading businessmen. Waddell was situated on the stage alongside “sixty of Wilmington’s most prominent citizens.” Waddell opened calmly, explaining that if the election season were an ordinary one, he wouldn’t be presenting a speech, but, since he could no longer “remain silent as I have done for some years,” he felt compelled to speak. As was the case for many speeches of the period, Waddell’s oration was published in the newspapers. Examination of his words demonstrates his mindset regarding the campaign and race relations—reflective of the sentiment and inflammatory nature of similar speakers at the height of the 1898 Democratic Party Campaign.

Waddell claimed that it was “best and wisest for both races” that white people who worked to make the United States the “grandest country on the globe . . . should alone govern it as a whole in all its parts.” Waddell suggested that blacks had been misled by people who professed to be their friends and contended that “the mass of them are ignorant and . . . have been played upon and preyed upon by vicious leaders of their own race and by mean white men who make this agitation a source of profit.” Waddell continued to stereotype and draw racist conclusions about African Americans as he claimed that if they were allowed to rule the South, “in less than a hundred years” they would return to “savagery.” Because he vested his understanding of blacks in his opinions of their intellect, he claimed that “the greatest crime that has ever been perpetrated against modern civilization was the investment of the negro with the right of suffrage.”

Moving from his analysis of the black race, Waddell claimed that “the salvation of society depends on the outcome of this election.” Waddell then emphatically

stated that the present situation was due to the actions of Governor Russell – “I do not hesitate to say thus publicly that if a race conflict occurs in North Carolina the very first men that ought to be held to account are the white leaders of the negroes who will be chiefly responsible for it and the work ought to begin at the top of the list. I scorn to leave any doubt as to whom I mean by this phrase—I mean the governor of this state, who is the engineer of all the deviltry and meanness.”

Waddell stated that he hoped that violence was not to be the duty of white men but proclaimed that if violence was necessary, “I trust that it will be rigidly and fearlessly performed.” Waddell then moved to political matters as he discussed the changes in election laws wrought by the Fusionists then turned the argument for “freedom of the ballot” against them.

On the topic of “negro domination,” Waddell contended that blacks constituted a voting block that could determine the outcome of elections. To this point, he asked the crowd “who ‘dominates’ any corporation or businesses, its agents appointed to carry it on or the owners who select them?” Waddell concluded that his “heart leaps out to the man who, in this crisis, talks and acts” like an “Anglo-Saxon who . . . feels that he is the sovereign and the master on the soil . . . and dares all who question it to put it to the test.” The final passage of Waddell’s speech stirred patriotic sentiment in his audience and contained lines destined to be oft-quoted in subsequent days and years—that the whites would “choke the current of the Cape Fear with [black] carcasses” in order to win the election.